

THE TRANSITION PROCESS FOR YOUNG CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

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Overview

Over the past two decades the transition of young children with disabilities has become more complex, resulting in an increasing need for improved transition process for both children and their families. Recent research in transition has provided valuable information about the individual variables that impact this complex transition process. Given some of the specialized characteristics of the transition process for young children with disabilities this paper presents a conceptual model that describes how multiple factors can interact to influence the transition process for young children with disabilities. This model is based on the premise that the ultimate goal of a successful transition process is the child's entry and success in the primary school program.

The Transition Process for Young Children with Disabilities

Transition is an interagency process that involves multiple parties including families and various agencies. This paper identifies three critical variables that influence the quality and nature of the transition process.

1. Communication and relationships – Successful transitions in the early childhood years reflect processes that involve communication between and relationships among the child, family, service providers, and agencies within the community.
2. A supportive interagency infrastructure – This infrastructure includes transition policies that are developed within and across programs that provide services, interagency agreements that outline specific roles and responsibilities for activities related to transition planning, and the formal and informal mechanisms that provide support for cross agency communication and coordination.
3. Alignment of programs and continuity of the service delivery system - The various providers of services in early childhood operate within different funding sources, administration, policies, curriculum and philosophies. Although programs do not have to be consistent across these dimensions for transition to be effective, an effective program supports continuity between programs.

Conclusion

Federal monitoring reports and state evaluations indicate that transitions have been and continue to be extremely problematic. Therefore, if we are going to improve the experiences and outcomes of those involved in transitions we need to understand: 1) the complex interactions and relationships among variables in the system; 2) how these complex interactions are linked to the child's success in school; 3) if the factors and their interrelationships are the same for the transitions at different times; and 4) how to address populations that are likely to experience the most difficulty during and after transitions.

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